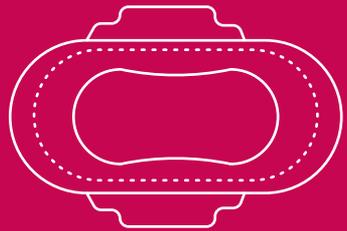




Women's Harm Reduction Tools & Tips

Tips about harm reduction and other supplies that are helpful for women who use drugs



INTRODUCTION

Women's Tools & Tips is part of WHAI's **Women and Harm Reduction In Ontario: A Capacity Building Toolkit**, which was created to strengthen the work harm reduction programs do with women who use drugs. Through consultations with women who use drugs across Ontario, we gathered feedback about harm reduction supplies that are helpful to women.

This resource provides tips about the supplies women who use drugs find helpful. Some of these supplies are provided through existing programs and some are not. Recognizing that resources are limited, we encourage organizations to be creative in finding ways to include items that are not already available. Raising awareness about these items, asking for donations, and fundraising may be helpful strategies.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

This resource provides tips about the following supplies and why they are helpful:

- **harm reduction supplies**
- **sexual health supplies**
- **hygiene and cosmetic supplies**



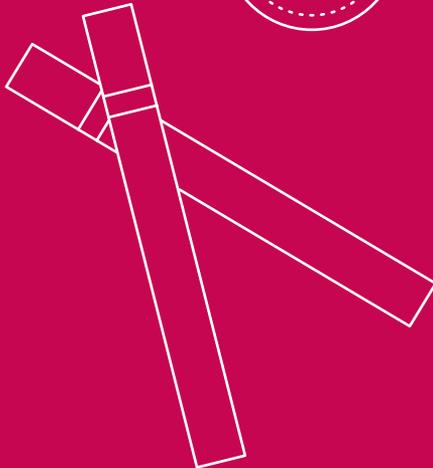
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- For more information on harm reduction supplies available through the Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program, check out ohrdp.ca/products or connect with your local public health team.

PART

1

Harm Reduction Supplies





Note: This is not a comprehensive list of harm reduction supplies that are available at a harm reduction program. Rather, it highlights some specific supplies that women identified as helpful.



HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES

Injection Supply Tips

SELECTION OF NEEDLES

- A selection of needles including small gauge and short tipped needles are useful for small or narrow veins.
- Needles that can be used for intramuscular injection and subcutaneous (under the skin) injection are important for those injecting Botox, silicone, or hormones. This is particularly relevant for Trans communities, helping to prevent people from sharing needles or using the same needle multiple times.

Syringe Size

Sizes vary based on volume capacity in cubic centimeters (cc) or millilitres (mL)

Needle Gauge

Size refers to how wide the inner measurement or opening of the needle is



Needle Tip Length

Sizes vary based on types of injections

PORTABLE NEEDLE/SHARPS CONTAINER >

- These fit nicely in a purse and act as a discreet needle disposal option.



Inhalation Supply Tips

FOIL >

- Providing single use foil can be helpful for those who are working to shift their drug use practices to inhalation from injection, and those who don't inject. Some evidence suggests that women are more likely to pick up foil kits than men¹. Since more than 70% of women participating in consultations for this project reported using drugs by methods other than (or in addition to) injecting, foil sheets are a useful resource for harm reduction programs to provide.



¹Pizzey, R., Neil Hunt. (2008, July). Distributing foil from needle and syringe programmes (NSPs) to promote transitions from heroin injecting to chasing: An evaluation. Retrieved from <https://harmreductionjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1477-7517-5-24>

SCREENS

- Many women talked about their desire for steel wool or Brillo. As per harm reduction best practices, harm reduction programs often provide brass screens which do not pose the same health risks as steel wool or Brillo. Requests for steel wool or Brillo provide an important opportunity to talk with women about harm reduction strategies.



Note: Steel wool and Brillo screens break down with the heat and vaporization of crack, and pieces become loose and can be inhaled, or impact the smoker's lips, throat or lungs, causing serious damage and more significant health issues. Small bits of metal can also be inhaled and become embedded in the respiratory system, causing infection or other acute and chronic health issues



Other Harm Reduction Supply Tips

LIGHTERS >

- Lighters can be helpful for smoking crack and crystal meth, or cooking drugs. Providing lighters can specifically help women to reduce the pressure to share drugs or equipment in exchange for using someone else's lighter. This can help women to increase their independence and autonomy in drug-using practices.

"You can use my lighter for a toke."



DISCREET PACKAGING <

- Packaging that can be carried around without being noticed is ideal. Large stickers, clear bags, or other identifying components make it more obvious that women have visited a harm reduction program or are using drugs, which may create a barrier if women are trying to keep this information private.





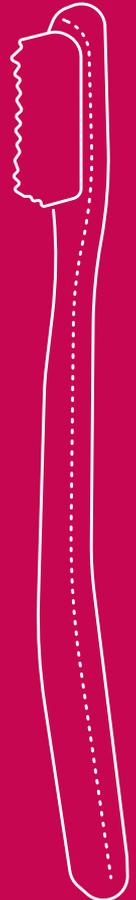
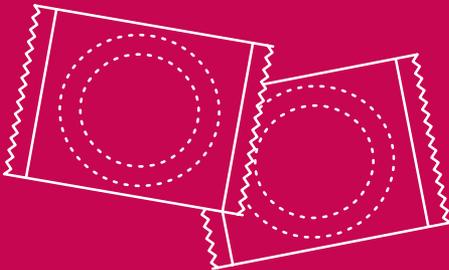
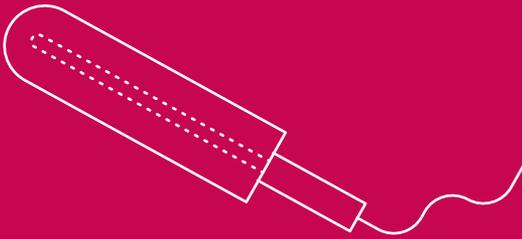
DRUG TESTING KITS

- Drug testing kits can be used to test which drugs are present in either a drug or urine sample, but not how much of a certain drug is in the tested supply, or how potent the tested supply is. Drug checking can be an important safety strategy for women. It can help women understand which drugs they may (or may not) be using, can empower them to make informed decisions about their drug use, and reduce the risks associated with using particular drugs, including overdose. Urine tests can also help to inform women what drugs are in their system, which can be helpful information for women facing drug screening. If using these kits to test drugs prior to using, harm reduction strategies should always be implemented in order to reduce the risk of overdose or negative drug side effects.

PART

2

Sexual Health, Hygiene & Cosmetic Supplies





Sexual Health, Hygiene & Cosmetic Supplies

While sexual health, hygiene and cosmetic supplies may seem like a “perk” in a harm reduction program, they can help to encourage women’s use of the program, provide much needed resources, and in some cases, address needs related to self-image, mental health, and even safety. In addition, hygiene supplies and cosmetics can create an opportunity for women to access a harm reduction program without identifying as someone who uses drugs.

Hygiene supplies and cosmetics can be helpful for women who live in poverty, and for women who may be hiding or covering blemishes or injuries. Notably, women who use drugs emphasized the relationship between poor mental health and risky drug use practices, highlighting that when people feel better about themselves, they take better care of themselves. Self-image can be a particularly important consideration when providing services to Trans women who may experience body dysmorphia (a mental health challenge rooted in body image). Trans women also identified that safety concerns can emerge for those who don’t “pass” as a woman, making it helpful to have access to cosmetics.

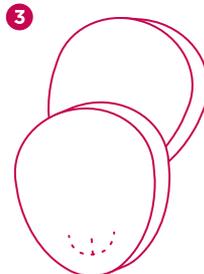
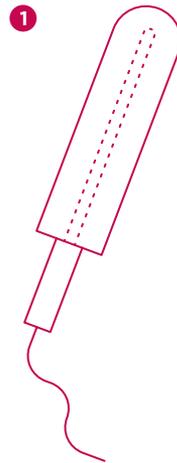
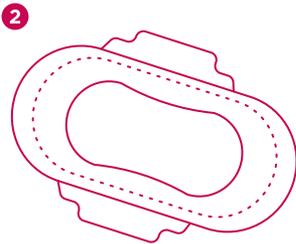
Women also identified the helpfulness of items specific to drug-use practices. For example, women talked about burning their hair on open flames (e.g., when smoking crack), making hair elastics helpful. Similarly, lip balm can help prevent cracked lips and reduces the impact of burned lips.

“I started using the harm reduction program because I heard they had tampons. Once I went a few times, I got to know some of the workers and felt okay about picking up harm reduction supplies.”

Women who participated in this project shared the following list of sexual health, hygiene & cosmetic supplies they find the most helpful:

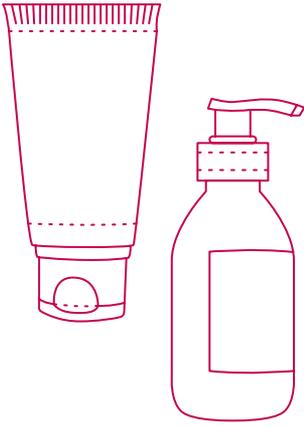
MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS >

1. Tampons
2. Pads
3. Sponges (menstrual sponges were identified as particularly helpful by those who do sex work)

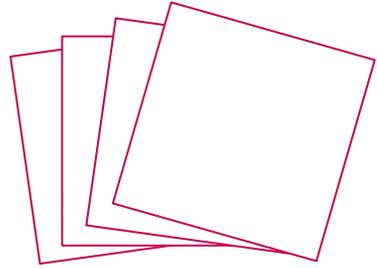


LUBE ✓

Including different types of lube



DENTAL DAMS ✓

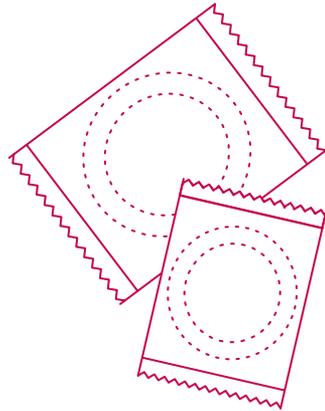


PREGNANCY TESTS ✓



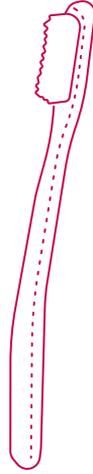
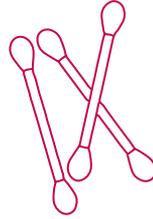
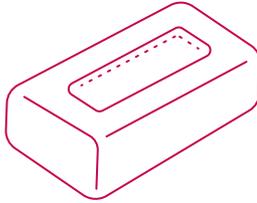
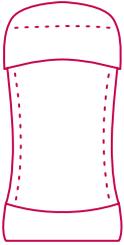
CONTRACEPTION >

1. Contraceptive Foam
2. Contraceptive Sponges
3. Condoms
 - » external, covering the penis
 - » internal, to insert in the vagina or anus



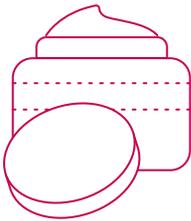
TOILETRIES

Including shampoo, conditioner, soap, deodorant, baby wipes, Q-tips, toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss, hair elastics, hairbrushes, razors & face wash



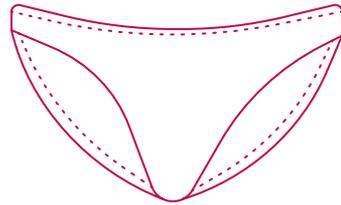
COSMETICS

Including makeup, lip balm & moisturizer



OTHER

Including socks & underwear

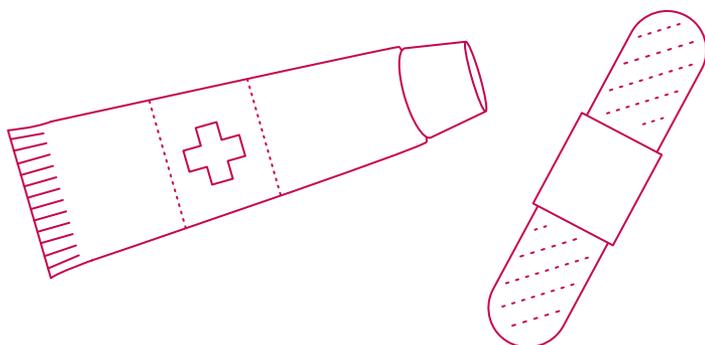


Note: Since some of these items can be costly to provide or may be beyond the capacity of the program, it can be helpful to seek donations from community or local retailers to help provide these or offer referrals to other services who do provide these.



FIRST AID SUPPLIES

Including items like bandages, single-use Polysporin, and foot care supplies can help address injuries and prevent infection. This was raised as an important issue by women who do sex work outdoors or in weather conditions that create dry skin, abrasions, blisters, and sores.



MAKE YOUR OWN KIT

A “create your own kit” option was also suggested, whereby people can pick up a bag and include what they need in their kit. Some women talked about the risk of bringing kits home that contain items such as condoms, which could cause conflict or violence in their relationship. There are other benefits, too. Some agencies who have piloted “create your own kit” programs report that it is cost saving and reduces waste of supplies. In addition, this option creates opportunity for discussion, and the sharing of harm reduction practices.



A Harm Reduction Tools & Tips Checklist

Below is a summary of items listed in this resource. Use it to assess which supplies may be helpful to provide.

HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES

- A selection of different sized needles
- Portable needle disposal containers
- Foil
- Screens
- Lighters
- Drug Testing Kits

HYGIENE AND COSMETIC SUPPLIES

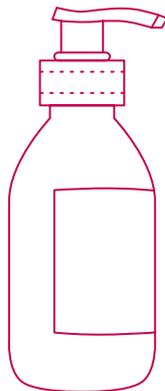
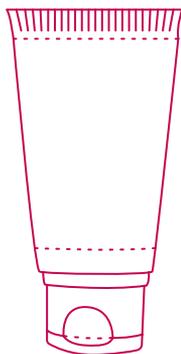
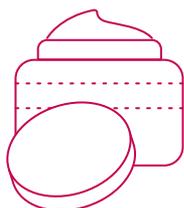
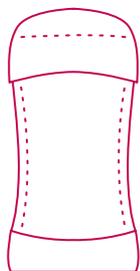
- Menstrual products
- Toiletries
- Cosmetics
- Lip Balm
- Hair elastics
- Socks
- Underwear

SEXUAL HEALTH SUPPLIES

- A selection of lubes
- A selection of condoms
- Contraceptive foam
- Contraceptive sponges
- Pregnancy tests
- Dental Dams

FIRST AID SUPPLIES

- Bandages
- Polysporin
- Foot care supplies





For more information visit WHAI.CA